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HOW TO

CHOOSE THE PERFECT DOMAIN NAME



*Everything you need to know
about selecting your web address*

LYRICALHOST.COM

Domain names typically fall into two categories: generics, and brandables. Generic domain names are usually nouns with a clear topic, for example insurance.co. Brandable domain names are names, made-up words, and nouns that aren't associated with a particular product or service, e.g. kathyjbradshaw.com, zyacon.com, or smile.com.

As you might expect, it's pretty hard to find generic domains that are still free to register, although they can be bought more freely on the secondary market if you're willing to pay more. Most people register brandable names for their website as they're more readily available in a variety of extensions and as social media usernames. They're also a great opportunity to personalize your tone and brand.

Whichever you go for, this guide outlines what you need to know to pick your ideal domain name, covering:

- Golden rules
- Which extension/s to choose
- Protecting your brand
- Common availability questions

Let's get started!

The Golden Rules



1. Keep it short and sweet

This is one of the most important rules for choosing a great domain name.

Short names are:

- More memorable
- Easier and quicker for mobile users to type
- Harder for people to get wrong
- Easier for people with dyslexia
- Easier for people used to another language/alphabet

Tip: Be careful if you're considering a name where the extension is used to form part of a word, e.g. [sunsetcasablan.ca](#). It can be tricky for people to remember where the . is. Same goes for missing letters, e.g. [twittr.com](#). It's short, but easy to forget and a bit confusing. It could be good for a custom URL shortener, but not for your main brand domain name.

2. Make it easy to spell (and say)

Try to only include shortish words that are easy to pronounce and spell. Quirky spellings can look great but may cause problems when spoken out loud at an event or on the radio. Words with multiple spellings should be avoided if possible, especially if you're targeting an international audience with different spelling variations (e.g. 'color' vs 'colour'); you can pretty much eliminate this problem by buying the spelling variants and redirecting one to the other.

3. Check it passes the "radio test"

Try to avoid homophones (e.g. 'new' vs. 'knew'), because people hearing your domain

spoken may try the 'wrong' one (alternatively you could register both variants!). Be wary of numbers – is it '20' or 'twenty'? Is it 'O' or 'o'? – for the same reason.

Tip: If you're targeting a very international audience, try to make sure you use characters and sounds included in as many native alphabets as possible.

4. Pick something that makes sense

Always choose a name that directly reflects you/your brand. There's nothing more confusing and less memorable than having your business name as Lucy-Jo Smith Photography, but your domain name as *supergreatphotography.com*.

5. Consider how you want your name to come across

Your name is such a huge part of your brand that it's important your domain reflects this too. Think about the tone of your brand and whether the word/s you choose will appeal to your target audience. *PiggleGiggle.com* is a cute name for a children's petting farm for example, but not so great for a vegetarian bacon company. Unless you're targeting a jokey vegan audience, of course ;)

Tip: If you're considering 'made up' or cool-sounding words, check what they mean in other languages before committing!

6. Plan for the future

Don't pick something very specific, like *xyzweddingphotos.com*, if you might branch out into baby photography in the future. You can always create specific subdomains or folders if you pick *xyzphotography.com*.

Similarly, don't go for *yourname2018.com* (unless you're using it for a specific event, such as a wedding), because it will look outdated very quickly. Cutesy usernames are best avoided for the same reason; you won't always be *snugglekitten91!*

7. Don't worry about SEO keywords

Putting keywords in your domain name or using an exact match phrase used to be really important for Google rankings, but not any more. Bing still values exact match a bit more at the moment, but as it grows in sophistication this is likely to change. There are so many other things that will have more of an impact on your search engine rankings that you're better off picking a name based on length, simplicity, and branding rather than focusing on keywords.

The domain name **extension** you choose *can* affect your search engine rankings in some cases though, which is something we cover in the next section of this guide.

8. Keep hyphens to a minimum

It's another character for people to forget or get wrong, especially in email addresses. If your name is multiple words long, it's a good idea to buy the hyphenated version and redirect it to your non-hyphenated version just in case, but try to avoid multiple hyphens in your main name.

9. Avoid trademarks

Never register trademarked words, terms, or names, or you risk losing your domain and gaining an expensive lawsuit.

10. Go with your gut

If the name you're thinking about doesn't 'feel' right, keep brainstorming and researching. Sometimes you can't explain why it's not right, and there's no logical explanation for it.

On the other hand, if it's a name you keep coming back to, there's a reason for that. Sometimes it's best to register first and think about it later, rather than changing your mind and finding that it's no longer available.

11. Get a second opinion from someone you trust

Or a third opinion, or a fourth. It can be useful to ask a mix of technical and non-technical people to get a range of perspectives, or your target customer.

Don't be tempted to post a poll online, because you risk all the names getting registered by someone else looking to make a profit out of you or take advantage of your opportunity.

Choosing Domain Extensions



There are so many domain name extensions out there, it's hard to know what to pick! Some golden rules still apply: short, memorable, and easy to type are always winners. Beyond that, your target audience typically dictates which extension/s you should go for.

If you're going for a global audience, the US, or you're not targeting a specific geographical location .com is your best bet, followed by .net. If you're running a non-profit site, .org works too.

If you're targeting a specific country outside the US go for the local country extension (e.g. .ca, .de, .co.uk, .uk). This is particularly important if you're selling goods or services from your website as people know straight away from your name that you ship to them or will be available in the same/a similar time zone.

Other considerations

What's the primary purpose of the domain name? For example, if you're buying one to use as a custom URL shortener or vanity address, you'll probably want a two-letter domain extension (e.g. we have <http://lyri.cl> for sharing links on social media).

Planning to monetize your website through adverts and sponsorship? Extend your potential opportunities by going for a globally popular domain extension like .com, or target local advertisers with a country-specific extension.

Picking one of the newer domain extensions can make you stand out from the crowd and instantly tell your audience what to expect from your website, so .blog or .photo can be a good choice if you're planning to stick in a specific field and/or protect your brand.

Protecting Your Brand



Don't just stick to one extension; if there are multiple variants that fit your brand, go for them! The general rule of thumb when it comes to domain names is that the only limit is your budget. It's better to buy a domain name 'just in case' and let it drop if you end up not using it/changing your mind rather than risk someone else registering it.

Other people could register similar domain names or alternative extensions to yours to:

- Pretend to be you/your company (e.g. to capitalize on your visitors mistyping your domain name, or for phishing scams).
- Try to sell you the domain for a much higher price, typically hundreds to thousands of dollars.

Try to register your chosen name in as many popular extensions as you can, for example .com, .net, your local country extension if outside the US, and so on. You can set up redirects to your main domain name for free.

Tip: You could also consider trademarking your name if you're really concerned, which makes it possible to dispute third party domain name registrations that could be seen to be taking advantage of your brand name.

As well as extensions, you may want to consider registering some of the following variations of your domain name:

- Common misspellings and typos, particularly if your name is spelled in an unconventional way or contains a word people tend to struggle with.
- Plurals/non-plurals.
- Different grammatical forms, e.g. we've registered *lyricalhost.com* and *lyricalhosting.com*.
- Hyphenated versions, e.g. we've registered *lyrical-host.com*.
- Synonyms: e.g. *beautifulpetphotography.com* and *prettypetphotography.com*.

As you can see, you could literally go on for ever and register hundreds of domains just for one brand. Don't worry! Most people only have a few per project - you don't have to try and buy them in all variants and extensions. Just buy the ones that make sense for your needs and budget.

Common Domain Availability Questions



Should I still buy a domain if someone else has bought it in another extension, like .com?

Have a look and see what it's being used for - is it something in your field or that could be confused with you, even if it's just similar colors to what you were planning to use? If so, it's time to go back to the drawing board.

On the other hand, if it's been left parked or unused for a long time (you can find out by looking it up at <http://who.is> and <http://web.archive.org>), it gives you a very good chance of establishing your brand first, albeit on a different extension. If you feel like you have to have the .com (or whatever extension has been taken), that's okay too - just go back to brainstorming!

Help! What can I do if my ideal name has been taken?

Don't worry! There are a few little things you can do to find a great name without compromising too much:

- Try adding short words before the text you want, e.g. 'get', 'the', 'from', 'think', 'ask', 'hello', 'shop', 'just', 'visit'.
- Or add short words after your text, e.g. 'photos', 'blog', 'creative', 'design', 'store', 'web', 'writes', 'speaks', 'agency', 'co', 'notes', your state abbreviation or the first couple of letters of your postcode if you're a business.
- Try Latin or Greek variants of words...or whatever language you like! Google Translate is a really fast free way to get a lot of options quickly.

What else do I need to consider?

Don't forget to check that the matching social media usernames are also available! Social media names typically have less availability than domains because they're free. Check if the usernames are available on the networks you're planning to be active on by visiting the sites and going through sign up, or using a social checker tool.

If you can't get them all, consider a consistent alternative for all social media networks by adding short words before or after as suggested above. Even if your social media usernames can't match your domain name, the second best outcome is that they match each other.

